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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION TO THE USS KEARSARGE VISIT

REF: GEORGETOWN 698

¶1. (U) Summary. The November 9-22 humanitarian mission to Guyana of the USS KEARSARGE generated widespread and overwhelmingly favorable coverage in both print and broadcast local media. The media consistently incorporated the KEARSARGE's motto "Continuing Promise" into their reporting, and frequently utilized buzz words such as "partnership." This was a significant achievement considering the logistical challenges involved in arranging media coverage for medical activities that took place entirely within the remote and sparsely populated Region One, which has zero local media outlets and only reachable by air. End Summary.

¶2. (U) From the opening ceremony and commencement of medical activities on November 10 through the closing ceremony and the ship's departure on November 22, the mission of the USS KEARSARGE captured the public's interest and generated ample coverage in print and broadcast media. The four local newspapers collectively carried a total of 46 stories covering the visit and activities of the ship's personnel, and the mission garnered front-page photos on multiple occasions. Headlines included "Northwest residents grateful for U.S. medical mission," "USS Kearsarge Medical Team Saves Moruca Girl," "U.S. medical personnel 'Open' Eyes of Mabaruma Girl," and "Mission Accomplished: USS Kearsarge Crew bids Poignant Farewell." Kearsarge-related broadcast stories also led evening newscasts on five stations, in most cases on several occasions. Media outlets also provided ample coverage to the five engineering activities carried out in the Georgetown area; one article covering a ribbon-cutting ceremony was headlined: "Smiles All Around."

¶3. (U) In addition to lauding the overall effort and marveling at the ship and its capacities, the press also drew attention to individual stories of both patients and crew. The Guyana Times featured a story of a three year-old girl with fused eyelids who was taken aboard the ship for surgery, as well as featuring before-and-after photos of the result, which the story stated "...allowed her to see her parents for the first time in her life." Kaieteur News featured a front page photo and article about the life-saving transport flight by a KEARSARGE helicopter of a fifteen year-old girl in need of an emergency appendectomy from her Region One town to Georgetown, where she was able to successfully undergo surgery by a local doctor. Several media outlets highlighted the education and patriotism of five Guyanese-American crewmen among the U.S. Navy contingent aboard the ship, and how they felt about being involved with the humanitarian mission to help their native country.

¶4. (U) Local media repeatedly invoked USG buzzwords for the KEARSARGE mission, with particular focus on the "collaboration" between Kearsarge personnel and their Guyanese counterparts, as well as the mission motto: "Continuing Promise".

¶5. (U) As noted in reftel, the logistical challenges involved in the KEARSARGE medical operation were significant, principally due to the remote locations. Arranging adequate media coverage was no less complicated. By providing an early opportunity for eighteen local journalists to travel by helicopter to tour the ship and meet the crew, and then by ensuring there were at least several helo seats available for journalists on all site visits, the PD teams of the

ship and the Embassy were able to facilitate wide coverage of activities taking place in a part of the country where no media representatives reside, and where many Georgetown-based media have never visited.

¶6. (U) There are no reliable statistics available regarding newspaper readership in Guyana. Anecdotally, the Stabroek News and Kaieteur News are both read widely, including by the New York City diaspora, with the former considered a better source for sound journalism, and the latter more sensationalist. The Guyana Chronicle is the government-owned paper, while the generally government-leaning Guyana Times started operating earlier this year. All four papers are widely available along Guyana's coast, where ninety percent of the population lives. None of the papers has a significant pro or anti-American tilt, and all report on Embassy-related events regularly. Likewise, the Hinterland Highlights, a quarterly publication circulated widely in Region One, featured a color centerfold of the humanitarian mission in its issue just prior to the ship's arrival.

¶7. (U) Comment: While post anticipated diminishing media attention in the mission considering its nearly two-week duration, KEARSARGE fatigue never materialized. The remote nature of the medical sites - and the corresponding inaccessibility for local media - as well as the staggered schedule of medical activities actually helped us stretch the coverage out. Since the media could only cover an activity when they were flown to it, each ship tour or site visit brought a fresh set of stories in the next news cycle. As is the case with the medical outreach activities themselves, from a public diplomacy standpoint, Guyana is fertile ground for this type of activity. End Comment.

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